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DO NOT ENTER: /K.G/ IN THE CLAIMS

07/07/2008

1-36 (canceled)

37. (currently amended) A compact ~~material~~ comprising:

70 to 97 vol % component A comprising alpha- and beta-SiAlON and a ~~and an amorphous or~~ partially crystalline grain-boundary phase; and

5 to 20 ~~3 to 20~~ vol.% of component B comprising a hard material is in globular form and an average grain size of 1-5 microns ~~has an average grain size~~;

wherein ~~when~~ the compact is sintered ~~to form a sintered compact having~~ and has a sintered ~~surface, the sintered compact has~~ surface and a hardness of at least 1550 HV 10 and wherein said compact has an alpha-SiAlON gradient which decreases from ~~outside the compact~~ the sintered surface to an inside of the sintered compact;

wherein ~~the alpha-SiAlON content of~~ the sintered surface ~~ranges~~ has an alpha-SiAlON content of up to 100%,

wherein said hard material is SiC, ~~at least one of SiC, Ti(C,N), TiC, TiN, a carbide of an element from one of groups IVb, Vb and VIb of the periodic table, scandium carbide, scandium oxycarbide or a nitride of an element from one of groups IVa, Vb and VIb of the periodic table,~~ wherein the state of the hard material remains unchanged after sintering;

wherein the content of grain-boundary phase is less than 10 vol.% and comprises phases of aluminum containing melilite or disilicate;

wherein in the ~~sintered state~~ inside of the ~~said~~ sintered compact comprises from 1.5 to 50 vol.% ~~the amount of~~ alpha-SiAlON ~~present ranges from 10 to 90 vol.%~~; and

wherein the amount of beta-SiAlON ranges from 10 to 90 vol.%.